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SUBJECT: Solana's Visit, Syria/Iran, Syria/Lebanon, Iraq,  
Palestinian Territories (3/15-18)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers reported the visit to Damascus by European Union Higher Representative for Common Foreign Policy and Security, Javier Solana on March 14. Ziyad Haydar, a journalist in independent Al-Watan said Solana and President Asad held a closed 50-minute meeting during which the European envoy "explained the policy of the EU toward the entire region, focusing on Lebanon, while the Syrian side focused on security fears and concerns over the stability of the whole region." The report added: "Al-Watan learned that Al-Asad told Solana that Damascus 'cannot deal with Europe and the United States except through its interests, and when the interests converge, the cooperation will be complete.'" The report said Al-Asad also explained that "Syria is no longer interested in the association agreement with the EU and that its confidence in the EU has receded." On Lebanon, the paper said, "Asad stressed that Syria's positions toward Lebanon have not changed."

On Saturday Syria welcomed the formation of the Palestinian national unity government which received the Palestinian Legislative Council's vote of confidence today. "Syria stresses support for the national unity government as it is the pillar that guarantees Palestinian unity... it is very important to provide necessary environment to make the deeds of this government a success," an official source told SANA.

"Syria calls on the international community to offer full support to this government and deal with all of its members as it represents the Palestinian people's consensus," the official source added. It underlined that Syria calls for lifting the siege imposed on the Palestinian people who suffered during the last period from this unfair siege.

On Syrian/Lebanese relations papers featured a statement by Syrian Interior Minister Abdul-Majeed criticizing a statement by Lebanese Interior Minister Al-Sab'a linking Fatah Islam, the group that he said was responsible for the bus bombings in 'Ein Alaq', to Syrian intelligence. Abdul-Majeed described the story as "programmed fabrications."

On March 16 government-owned Al-Thawra cited a statement by Dr. Bashar al-Ja'fari, Syria's permanent representative to the United

Nations, describing international Judge Serge Brammertz's latest report on the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri as "professional, technical, and pragmatic." Al-Ja'fari said that the report referred to Syria's satisfactory cooperation with the investigation committee.

End of summary.

## 12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad reviews current developments and regional issues with Solana. Focus is on consultations with Europe and an efficient EU role. International resolutions regulate the peace process" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/15)

"Syrian Interior Minister Abdul-Majeed: Lebanese Interior Minister's accusations against Syria, linking Fatah Islam with the Syrian intelligence, are programmed fabrications. Fatah Islam is one branch of al-Qaeda organization and has planned terrorist acts in Syria" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 3/15)

"Syria's UN Representative Jaafari: Brammertz's report is professional, technical, and pragmatic. The report praised Syria's cooperation" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 3/16)

"Syrian Premier Otri briefs Iranian President Ahmedinejad on the outcome of the Higher Syrian-Iranian Committee meetings. Ahmedinejad: We look forward to wider cooperation" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/17)

"Prime Minister Mohammed Naji Ottri stresses to the Iraqi Minister of Electricity Kareem Wahid Hasan Syria's commitment to realize Iraq's stability and security. Ottri confirms Syria's readiness to contribute to rebuilding Iraq and meeting the demands of Iraqi brothers in all fields" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/18)

"Geagea is being tried on the charge of kidnapping Lebanese citizens. Hizbollah Leader Nasrallah warns against procrastination by the governing team" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/17)

"Information Minister Dr. Mohsen Bilal confirms that Syria is working seriously to make the forthcoming Arab Summit in Riyadh a success. Bilal: There are new prospects with the EU" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/18)

"Syria welcomes and reiterates support for the Palestinian national unity government considering it as a basis to unify Palestinian ranks. The Hanieh government takes the oath" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/18)

"The first Palestinian national unity government will take oath tomorrow. Washington postpones announcing its position towards the new Palestinian government and Israel endeavors to renew sedition" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/17)

"11 US soldiers killed within two days. US Defense Minister Gates: The war in Iraq was more difficult than expected" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/17)

"The Pentagon: American and British troops are being exposed to 1000 attacks on a weekly basis in Iraq. Withdrawal from Iraq before September 2008" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 3/16)

"Massive demonstrations sweep US cities protesting President Bush's policy in the world and demanding that he withdraw from Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 3/18)

## 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"The Carrot and the Stick in the European Position"  
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Thana al-Imam, a commentator in independent Al-Watan, wrote (3/15):  
"Although Solana, in his joint news conference with Syrian Foreign

Minister Walid al-Mouallem, did not mention the deployment of international forces on the Lebanese-Syrian border, it is very clear that Europe sticks to this demand....

"As Syria insists on its rejection of such deployment, the EU decided to adopt a stick-and-carrot policy toward Damascus. Solana hinted that there is a chance now to make Syria part of the proposed initiatives. He also stressed that the EU supports the peace process and Syria's right to regain the territories it lost in 1967. Naturally, Syria welcomes this because it effectively breaks the isolation that the West in general and the United States in particular tried to impose on it in the past two years....

"Observers believe that the deployment of international forces on the border between Lebanon and Syria will close yet another window to the neighborhood for Damascus, as it would be surrounded by Israel on one side, the international forces on another side, and the American forces in Iraq on a third side, while the repercussions of the deployment of international forces on the Syrian-Lebanese border might [be a] 'promise' of a peace agreement between Lebanon and Israel."

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"'Ein Alaq' and Satan's Eye"  
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Isam Dari, Chief Editor of government-owned Tishreen, wrote (3/17): "We are no longer surprised that Syria is accused of involvement in every crime committed in Lebanon. But we are surprised at the weak political discourse of the February 14 team, which never succeeded when it directed accusations against Syria in the past....

"Lebanese Interior Minister Basim al-Sab'a linked Fatah Islam, the group that he said was responsible for the bus bombings in 'Ein Alaq', to Syrian intelligence....

"Al-Sab'a forgot that Syria is a secular state that does not deal with Salafi fundamentalist groups, especially the terrorist groups among them, which took up killings, bombings, and assassinations as a profession. He forgot that Syria waged a relentless war against such groups and that the Syrians suffered from their terrorism for long before the competent authorities managed to put an end to their terrorism and crimes....

"But Al-Sab'a had to play his designated role in order not to say that the same people, who are known for their hostility toward Syria, the resistance, and Arabism and their unconcealed love for Israel, are the ones who always jump to level accusations against Syria without any proof or evidence....

"A recent article by American journalist Seymour Hersh revealed that Al-Saniora's government opened channels with the group Fatah al-Islam as part of its efforts to confront Hizbollah....

"Reiterating accusations against Syria by the Lebanese government team coincided with the start of a kind of dialogue between Damascus and both the United States and Europe, and came on the eve of the report that Judge Serge Brammertz submitted to the Security Council on the investigations into the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri....

"The Lebanese governing team thought that its new fabrications might close the European door and the American window and bring Syria back to the cycle of the American-European political isolation.... This team sank deeper in the swamp of exposed lies that no longer deceive anyone...."

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"Palestinian Government"  
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Samir al-Shibani, a commentator in government-owned Tishrin wrote

(3/17): "All Palestinians, Arabs, and nations that love justice and peace in the world received the news on the formation of a Palestinian nation unity government with satisfaction.

"The new government sums up an integrated national Palestinian program that no party has the right to relinquish any small part of it, as the Palestinian and Arab people offered millions of refugees and hundreds of thousands of martyrs, wounded, and detainees for its sake.

"Israel's rejection of the new government did not come as a surprise to those who know the nature of the Israeli plan, which is based on the perpetuation of the occupation and the settlement activity and imposing them as a status quo, and on the creation of sectarian and denominational seditions among the peoples and countries of this region.

"The next Arab summit in Riyadh can, through coordination and cooperation, accomplish great agreements to protect the Arab nation...."

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"Facts Known by Solana"

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Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (3/15): "Syria's position remains as it has always been. So there is no need for tests, examinations, and conditions. EU Foreign Policy High Representative Javier Solana noticed this during his talks in Damascus. He heard clear Syrian words about the situation in the region and the need to address the region's issues and solve its problems so that security and stability can prevail and the potential for tension can disappear...."

"Europeans know well that Syria is the victim of an Israeli occupation of part of its territory. They also know that Syria is under immense political and economic pressure as a result of the United States' occupation of Iraq, interference in domestic Lebanese affairs, obstruction of a just and comprehensive peace, and flagrant support for the Israeli aggression...."

"These are known and tangible facts. So why are there these Western attempts to tarnish Syria's image and implicate it in everything bad? And why are there these European conditions and tests if things are so clear; namely, that Syria is fully innocent of the charges leveled against it while Israel is practicing aggression and is responsible for the tension in the region?"

"The EU is supposed to answer the abovementioned questions. The EU's return to Syria, though important, is supposed to be followed directly by a calm and serious dialogue on the affairs and issues of the region with a view toward reaching the just solution that returns the occupied Arab territories and uproots the causes of tension. Continuing to level accusations to Syria and to apply pressure on it for Israeli and American reasons, on the other hand, would only complicate things further -- something that neither the EU nor Solana, we believe, wants."

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"Israel Has No Will for Peace"

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Muhammad Ali Buzah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (3/15): "The Israeli Foreign Minister's call on Arabs to normalize their relations with Israel before the achievement of peace shows that Israel, which is suffering from its defeat in Lebanon and its crisis in the Palestinian territories, has still not drawn the lessons from its old and new experiences...."

"The Israeli Foreign Minister refuses to admit that the American-Israeli plan has failed. She is trying to circumvent facts, raise moral, and delude people into thinking that the keys to war and peace are in Israel's hands...."

"This is escalation, blackmail and an attempt to obstruct Europe's effort to bring about a just peace in the region.... But Israel and its backers forget that the time of belligerence and imposition of conditions through war and the brute force has gone....

"Israeli positions keep the region in a cycle of fire, violence, tension, and instability.... An explosion in the region would have disastrous and devastating consequences for Israel itself and the interests of the United States and the rest of the world...."

Corbin